

One of a Kind

Clotilde de Jamblinne, honorary chair of the Coalition for Fair Fisheries Arrangements (CFFA), was a quiet and self-effacing stalwart committed to the fight for the rights of fishers

For those of us who knew Clotilde de Jamblinne, her sudden passing came as a surprise because she was still so active and joyous though all of 97 years. I had known her from the AFI group of which she had become a member in 1949. Along with professional women from developing countries, it had colleagues in India, too, where I worked. As part of the group, Clo had traveled to the US for studies. There she became known for her immense courage to drive alone cross-country, transporting furniture in a second-hand vehicle.

She took charge of training other young women who aspired to be part of the group. She subsequently worked in Rwanda and was back in Belgium after eight years of work in the administration of a hospital there. In Belgium she worked in the secretariat of the Entraide et Fraternelle, a support group that funded grassroots work in developing countries, which is where I got to know her well. Universally acknowledged was her spirit of service. She drove everything and everybody around her, organizing places and documents and then housing the global wanderers. Hence it came naturally to me to suggest to Pierre Gillet that he should ask Clo to help with the setting up of the first office of the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF) in Brussels in 1986. ICSF had no funds to pay anybody or to hire an office space. One of Gillet's cousins provided that to us, very near the Grand Place.


"Clo was a real stalwart," said Brian O'Riordan, who worked closely with her subsequently at the office. "Always there, quietly, competently behind the scenes at events, in the documentation centre, welcoming visitors to the ICSF Brussels office, and taking a keen interest in all the people

and programmes of ICSF." That was exactly her, always behind the scenes but keenly interested.

Then in the 1990s, when the Coalition for Fair Fisheries Arrangements (CFFA) was set up to enable small-scale African fishers to defend their rights before European institutions, she volunteered to take up the helm, becoming its first chair. For years, she came to the office every Tuesday and Friday, meticulously recording and organizing all the publications and documents. If ICSF, and then CFFA, managed to set up a documentation centre on small-scale fisheries in Brussels, it's thanks to Clo.

She was always there with her smiling simplicity, welcoming and feeding women and men from all over the world who had come to Brussels to defend their rights to make a living from fishing. In May, a few months before her final goodbye, Clo was at the CFFA's 30th anniversary celebrations. As another CFFA Board member wrote: "Clo was so happy to be with us and our African partners, proud no doubt to see that this small association, which she chaired for many years, was going strong, and that a new generation had taken up the reins and was continuing the fight to which she had committed herself."

When she was taken to the hospital suddenly, a few hours before she passed away, she is said to have exclaimed: "Find out how our colleagues in Ramallah are." She was closely following the events there and in other parts of the world where people are struggling for their rights. She was one of a kind.

You are dearly remembered, Clo. We thank you for being who you were. 

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